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## REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTICES.

Vedische Mythologie. Von ALFRED HILLEBRANDT. Erster Band. Soma und verwandte Götter. Breslau, Wilhelm Koebner, 1891.

The widely celebrated plant which the Hindus designate by the word *soma* and the Iranians by the word *haoma* is the subject of the exhaustive study of the learned professor of Sanskrit in the University of Breslau. Professor Hillebrandt's qualifications for such an investigation are unsurpassed; his general knowledge of the Vedas, as well as his very special and extensive knowledge of the Vedic ritual, points to him as the very scholar best fitted for the delicate task. In the Veda and the Avesta alike, the earliest practices are strongly permeated with the cult of this plant. The earliest religious heroes of the Avesta are represented in Yasna IX as having successively pressed the *haoma* for their own good and for the happiness of their subjects. The *haoma* is the plant and its juice the drink of the golden age of Zoroastrian antiquities. A French savant, the late Abel Bergaigne, in a posthumous essay published in the *Journal Asiatique*, vol. XIII (1888), following sundry indications of Professor Ludwig's, pointed out certain very significant circumstances which tend to show that the so-called 'family-books' of the Rig-Veda (books II-VIII) are essentially Soma-books; that is, they were composed as songs or prayers accompanying a *soma*-sacrifice which is the prototype of the *jyotiṣṭoma* of the later formal ritual, as described in the Sūtras. The *soma* is the expressed or implied centre of Vedic religious life to an extent which cannot easily be paralleled from the religious history of any other people: every part and characteristic of the plant, every act in the pressing of the intoxicating and inspiring liquor, is noticed with sedulous care, and made the basis of religious speculation. The precise extent to which the *soma* engages sacerdotal activity in the Veda does not as yet, even after Professor Hillebrandt's careful analysis, appear with sufficient emphasis. I venture to say that the adjustment in correct perspective of the *soma*-cult will ultimately show better than anything else what the Rig-Veda really is. Even now one may venture to state that the great mass of the hymns of that collection were composed as a part of the *soma*-ritual, that the Rig-Veda is essentially a *soma*-book.

The body of Professor Hillebrandt's work is divided, very naturally, into two parts. The first deals with the plant and the liquor which is expressed from it. Every descriptive detail concerning the branches, the stems, the color, the places where the plant grows, and the modes by which it is procured, is discussed with great care, in order to establish the biological character of the plant. Every circumstance connected with the pressure, the instruments with which the juice is extracted, the vessels into which it is gathered, the times and occasions on which it is drunk, the admixtures by which it is

enriched and modified—all these are stated in order, and stated strictly upon the basis of the documents. This part of the investigation may be regarded as approximately final, notwithstanding the essentially negative result; for the author concludes that the plant which was considered as the most excellent by the Indo-Iranians, the remoter ancestors of the Vedic people, was not necessarily the one whose praises are sung in the Veda, and the plant described in the Veda need not be the *sarcostemma* of the later tradition. Only one statement occurs with unfailing persistence: the fluid is extracted from bright-colored shoots and branches, and this, according to the author, is necessarily so, since the Soma is the 'moon-plant' (p. 13). The bright shoots of the plant are the rays of the moon.

This brings us to the second part, the mythological interpretation of Soma, which Professor Hillebrandt establishes with great skill and well-nigh exhaustive philological learning. Vedic scholars in general had noticed the positive identification of the moon with Soma; this is, indeed, a commonplace in the 'second period' of Vedic literature, the Brāhmanas, and continues from that time on through Sanskrit literature. It had been admitted also that this identification is expressed roundly in parts of the Rig-Veda itself, which are supposed to be of somewhat later date than the body of that collection. Here and there a voice had been raised, more or less clearly and confidently, calling for a complete identification of Soma and the moon, even in the earliest parts of the Veda (Professors De Gubernatis and Pischel). Now Professor Hillebrandt undertakes to clarify and establish this view. The moon, in the view of the Vedic Hindu, is not only the silent illuminer and ruler of the night: that is only one side of its character, and by no means the most important. Incomparably more momentous is the following: the moon contains the drink of the gods, the *amṛtam*, the ambrosia. As the stems of the Soma swell in order to yield the juice, so does the moon swell for their nurture. The moon is a drop, or a wave, or a well in heaven full of sweet nourishment for the gods. In this sense the name Soma came to be the most common designation of the moon among the Hindu writers of the classical period. The Rig-Veda says: 'The moon moves along in the (heavenly) waters.' This simple physical conception is attributed to Soma as well, and with much fantastic modulation. Thus Soma is spoken of as the friend and husband of the waters. Since the clouds are constantly designated as cows, Soma, the moon, is compared with the bull who stands in the midst of the cows, or, with a quick turn of the imagination, the moon is the young calf of the cloud-cows. In short, the heavenly Soma is the moon throughout the Hindu religious writings, the 'earliest' parts of the Rig-Veda not excluded. So frequent are these Somic ideas that the centre of gravity in the mass of Vedic conception must be shifted from solar mythology to lunar mythology. The sun recedes, and in his place the moon dominates Vedic religious thought.

I think the readers of Professor Hillebrandt's book should be cautioned against this last view, whose saliency and catchiness render it an especially dangerous tool in the hands of those who are not adepts in Vedic religion. The Vedic hymns present a naturalistic polytheism entirely too catholic in its appreciation of natural phenomena to make it possible to designate it either as solar or lunar. It is both and neither. Bearing in mind Indra and the

countless cloud-demons which he destroys, one might with equal justice designate it as a monsoon-religion; or bearing in mind Agni in his varied aspects and functions, one might speak of fire-worship. As a matter of fact, the anthropomorphic gods which arose upon the basis of solar perceptions did finally happen to prevail. Soma in the later mythology is the moon, and never more, and as such holds a position in the lower pantheon. But Savitar, the inspiring, enlivening principle of the sun, and Tvaṣṭar, the divine artificer (according to the author, another solar god), blend with certain more abstract conceptions in Prajāpati, 'the lord of the creatures.' And Prajāpati, together with his variants Viṣvakarman, 'the fabricator of the universe,' Parameṣṭhin, 'he who occupies the highest summit,' Svayambhu, 'the self-existent being,' come as near the realization of monotheism as was ever possible in India. And these, as is well known, in their turn contributed to the development, or perhaps better, caused the development of the neuter *brahma* into Brahma, the ultimate pantheistic all-god, the final outcome of all Brahmanical speculation.

As to the main thesis of Professor Hillebrandt's book there can be no question. The moon is there in all those countless passages which describe Soma either in language so plain that one wonders now how it could ever have been misunderstood, or with a symbolism so fanciful as to remove, in part at least, the wonder. This investigation will help materially in removing the artificial barrier which has, until recent times, been kept around the hymnal literature, to the exclusion of the remaining Vedic and Hindu writings. About the pre-Vedic identity of Soma and the moon, however, I do not feel so certain. Professor Hillebrandt believes that Haoma in the Avesta is also to be identified with the moon, but the proofs which he adduces are few and, to my mind, inconclusive. The treatment of the *haoma*-plant in the Avesta is not reported with sufficient detail to justify the belief that the same *rapprochement* to the moon took place. The conception of the equivalence of Soma and the moon seems extremely difficult to conceive, if we eliminate the sacerdotal ritual of a highly-developed type, such as the songs of the Rig-Veda presuppose, to my thinking at least. In any case it seems difficult to imagine the identification of the moon with the *soma*-plant upon a basis of free popular thought. It is speculative; it is Talmudical; it savors of the priestly imagination. The presence of it in the Rig-Veda only tends, along with many other related facts, to show how far advanced in this direction 'the Aryan Bible' is. It does not by itself prove that the Indo- Iranians, or perchance the Indo-Europeans, knew of a 'moon-plant' from which they pressed an earthly ambrosia, emulating the gods whose nourishment was constantly replenished in the waning and increasing luminary of the night.

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Aristophanis Vespae cum prolegomenis et commentariis, ed. J. VAN LEEUWEN, J. F. L.-B., E. J. Brill, 1893.

A commentary on the Wasps, says van Leeuwen, is sadly needed. The text is well enough, but exegesis has been neglected. The latest commentary he knows is that of Richter, Berlin, 1858, and of Richter's competence as an interpreter of Aristophanes' jests van Leeuwen has a poor opinion, which he